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APPROVED FOR RELEASE

DATE Jan 1999

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[REDACTED]

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THE KILLING OF A U.S. CITIZEN IN PETEN DEPARTMENT IN JUNE 1990 [REDACTED] IS HAVING SERIOUS RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE GUATEMALAN ARMY, AS IT IS DAMAGING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT. THE CASE HAS TURNED INTO A LIGHTNING ROD FOR CRITICISM WITHIN THE ARMY OF THE ARMY COMMAND AND IS INCREASING ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENT AMONG SOME ARMY OFFICERS.

2. [REDACTED] THE MURDER WAS THE ISOLATED RESULT OF A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVING ACTIVITIES OF THE VICTIM THAT IN SOME WAY ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF THE MILITARY. WHEN ORDERED TO CONDUCT A ROUTINE INVESTIGATION INTO THE U.S. CITIZEN'S ACTIVITIES, THE ENLISTED PERSONNEL CHARGED WITH CARRYING IT OUT DID SO IN A CARELESS MANNER. THEY MISUNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION AND APPROACHED THEIR MISSION WITH A HOSTILE ATTITUDE THAT WAS INAPPROPRIATE. THE OFFICER NOTED THE MILITARY WAS AWARE THE VICTIM OCCASIONALLY SMOKED MARIJUANA AND ENJOYED A BOHEMIAN LIFESTYLE, BUT THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE HE WAS INVOLVED IN ANY SERIOUS ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES. ACCORDING TO THE OFFICER, THE ARMY COMMAND SAW THE KILLING AS AN EMBARRASSING TRAGEDY THAT THE ARMY ULTIMATELY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR BECAUSE ARMY OFFICERS INVOLVED KNEW THE VICTIM WAS A LAW-ABIDING RESIDENT OF GUATEMALA.

3. WHEN WORD OF THE MURDER REACHED MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, THERE WAS A DEBATE ABOUT THE COURSE OF ACTION TO BE TAKEN. SOME OFFICERS URGED THE ARMY COMMAND TO ADMIT THAT IN THE COURSE OF AN INVESTIGATION A GROUP OF ENLISTED MEN HAD OVERSTEPPED THEIR ORDERS, AN ALTERCATION HAD OCCURRED, AND ONE OF THE SOLDIERS HAD KILLED THE U.S. CITIZEN. THIS EXPLANATION WOULD HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED BY A COURT-MARTIAL OF THE GUILTY PARTIES. THIS SUGGESTION WAS OVERRULED BY SENIOR OFFICERS WHO BELIEVED IT WOULD BE BETTER TO COVER UP ARMY INVOLVEMENT IN THE KILLING AND "STONEWALL" ANY ATTEMPTS TO INVESTIGATE IT. [REDACTED] THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP REASONED THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WOULD REACT ANGRILY TO THE UNPROVOKED KILLING OF ONE OF ITS CITIZENS BY GUATEMALAN SOLDIERS, AND THIS WOULD HURT THE ARMY'S IMAGE, PROVIDE PROPAGANDA TO THE INSURGENTS, AND JEOPARDIZE U.S. MILITARY AID. THE OFFICER COMMENTED THAT ALL OF THE PREDICTED EVENTS USED TO JUSTIFY THE COVERUP HAVE NOW OCCURRED BECAUSE OF IT.

4. [REDACTED] OF THE SOLDIERS NOW BEING HELD FOR THE ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN THE KILLING ONLY TWO WERE MOST LIKELY

[REDACTED]

CULPABLE. REGARDING ACCUSATIONS MADE AGAINST SECOND IN COMMAND OF MILITARY ZONE 23 COLONEL GUILLERMO ((PORTILLO)) GOMEZ, THE OFFICER SAID HE BELIEVED PORTILLO IS INNOCENT AND KNEW NOTHING OF THE CASE UNTIL AFTER THE SLAYING. THE ENLISTED MAN WHO ACCUSED PORTILLO LATER ADMITTED HE DID SO BECAUSE PORTILLO WAS A STRICT DISCIPLINARIAN WHO HAD ORDERED HIM PUNISHED IN THE PAST.

5. ALTHOUGH MOST ARMY OFFICERS ACKNOWLEDGE THE MILITARY MUST BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MURDER, EVEN IF UNINTENTIONAL, THERE IS A GENERAL REJECTION BY THE OFFICERS OF WHAT THEY REGARD AS NEGATIVE TACTICS ALLEGEDLY USED BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO SECURE TESTIMONY IN THE CASE. [REDACTED] THE ARMY COMMAND AND ARMY OFFICERS IN GENERAL ARE OUTRAGED AT WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS AN ATTEMPT BY THE U.S. TO BUY PERJURED TESTIMONY FROM THE PERSONS SUSPECTED TO BE INVOLVED IN THE CASE. IMPRISONED SOLDIERS CLAIM THE U.S. HAS OFFERED THEM RESIDENCY OR ASYLUM IN THE U.S. IN RETURN FOR PERJURED TESTIMONY. THIS HAS ANGERED ARMY OFFICERS AS THEY BELIEVE ALMOST ANY LOWER CLASS GUATEMALAN WOULD FALSELY TESTIFY TO GAIN LEGAL U.S. RESIDENCE. [REDACTED] THESE TACTICS ARE VIEWED AS EVIDENCE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS NOT INTERESTED IN THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CASE; RATHER, THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND OTHERS SIMPLY WANT TO USE THE CASE AS PROPAGANDA AGAINST GUATEMALA, AND THE ARMY IN PARTICULAR. (DAO COMMENT: THESE ALLEGATIONS RAISE THE SPECTER THAT THE ARMY IS ENGAGED IN A DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN FOR ITS OWN INTERNAL CONSUMPTION.)

6. [REDACTED] THE CASE CONTINUES TO SOUR A GUATEMALAN OFFICER CORPS ALREADY SUSPICIOUS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT MOTIVES AND PLANS. [REDACTED] THE INEPTNESS AND STUPIDITY OF THE ARMY COMMAND CAUSED THE CASE TO BALLOON FROM A TRAGIC ISOLATED INCIDENT INTO A SITUATION AFFECTING U.S./GUATEMALAN RELATIONS ON ALL LEVELS. THE CASE AND EVENTS SURROUNDING IT ARE BEHIND THE MILITARY COMMAND'S GROWING COLDNESS TOWARD THE U.S. THE ARMY COMMAND PAINTED ITSELF INTO A CORNER BY NOT IMMEDIATELY ADMITTING WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND TAKING ACTION TO PUNISH THE GUILTY. [REDACTED] THE SITUATION HAS NOW BECOME SO TENSE AND CHARGED WITH NATIONALISM THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY HONORABLE WAY FOR THE ARMY TO BACK AWAY FROM ITS ACTIONS WITHOUT SUFFERING AN ENORMOUS LOSS OF PRESTIGE AT A CRITICAL TIME IN GUATEMALA'S HISTORY. HE ADDED THAT THERE IS NO INDICATION THE ARMY COMMAND HAS THE SLIGHTEST IDEA OF HOW TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM, EVEN IF THE WILL TO RESOLVE IT EXISTS.